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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a summary of perception research and to suggest practical applications which will improve students' and teachers' communication ability. The "theory" section of this work is devoted to the definition of perception as a selective process, dependent on such factors as acuity of sensory equipment, physical point of view, psychophysical condition, past experience, and present needs and purposes. The manner in which perception is used in communication and basic principles such as continuity, proximity, perceptual constancy, and figure-ground relationship which influence perception are also examined. The "practice" section includes exercises suitable for classroom implementation in sensitivity, nonverbal perception, listening, and awareness. (KS)

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Perception and Communication

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the U.S. Office of Education and now sponsored by the National Institute of Education (NIE). It provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development efforts, and related information useful in developing more effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, and indexes current significant information and lists that information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—much informative data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of specific educational research are to be intelligible to teachers and applicable to teaching, considerable bodies of data must be reevaluated, focused, translated, and molded into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports readily accessible, NIE has directed the separate ERIC Clearinghouses to commission from recognized authorities information analysis papers in specific areas.

In addition, as with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as one of its primary goals bridging the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practices. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of sharply focused booklets based on concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with the best educational theory and/or research on a limited topic. It also

presents descriptions of classroom activities which are related to the described theory and assists the teacher in putting this theory into practice.

This idea is not unique. Nor is the series title: *Theory Into Practice* (TIP). Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks provide teachers with similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are unusual in their sharp focus on an educational need and their blend of sound academic theory with tested classroom practices. And they have been developed because of the increasing requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Committee. Suggestions for topics to be considered by the Committee should be directed to the Clearinghouse.

Bernard O'Donnell
Director, ERIC/RCS

Theory

What causes two people, or several people, to see the same event yet describe the happenings differently? Consider the arguments that have resulted over disagreements about what was seen. Two people witness a bank hold-up, yet both give the police different versions of what happened. They even differ as to how the robbers looked physically and how they were dressed. In short, the two people saw the same event but perceived it differently. Communication break-downs often occur between individuals as a result of inaccurate perceptions. Our purpose here is to provide an understanding of perception and its relationship to communication. Televised football games with instant replay have eliminated many conflicts with our perception of a happening in a football game. Unfortunately, we cannot have an "instant replay" in our daily living. Our observations, for the most part, are one-shot opportunities. A study of perception will hopefully improve our ability to perceive and, thus, not only enrich our lives but also increase our ability to communicate effectively.

What Is Perception?

It has been suggested by many people that the nature of perception is difficult to explain, perhaps because "we are too close to it to be able to see it clearly."[1] Because we are all perceivers, discussing the process of perception is much like trying to explain the earth's position in the Milky Way. Nonetheless, workable definitions of perception are available, such as this one: "Perception is the process by which you filter and interpret what your senses tell you so you can create a meaningful picture of the world."[2] Thus, perception is how we see things; it involves all of our senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling), although the senses most commonly used

in communication are sight, sound, and touch. Through perception, we give meaning to the things and people around us. We identify or select, then we organize and interpret what we experience. In order to perceive an object, we need the perceiver, the object (or person), and the situation.[3]

Generally, all people perceive differently because perception is based on our motivations, expectations, and personal experiences.[4] The process by which we determine what to perceive is called *selective* perception. Due to this selective process, we may omit items, add, or even change what we see or feel or hear. Often in speaking, we filter out information that we do not want to hear. Not all decisions that we make in selective perception are consciously controlled; we sometimes unconsciously choose what will be perceived. Obviously, we cannot be selective in our unconscious perceptions, but when we do have a choice in what to perceive, how is this decision made? How do we know what to select? Sarett, Foster, and Sarett[5] have suggested five determining factors in selective perception which play a role in speech communication.

1. *Acuity of Sensory Equipment.* As individuals, most of us are not equipped with perfect sensory organs. This means that we each have different abilities to interpret our world; we do not have the same eyesight, hearing, sense of touch, and so on. If we are weak in one area, we tend to make up for this lack with one of our other senses. What we select to perceive, therefore, is somewhat dependent on our sensory equipment.
2. *Physical Point of View.* Our physical proximity to an object, person, or event influences our selection. Sometimes we are too far away or too close or in an unbalanced location—all influence what we choose to perceive.
3. *Psycho-Physical Condition.* An existing mood or feeling dictates to some degree what we perceive. If weary or sad, we are not as apt to be alert or interested. We select according to our moods.
4. *Past Experiences.* As indicated earlier, our past experiences play a vital role in perception. We respond to given situations because of our former experiences and, thus, pick out what will be perceived.
5. *Present Needs and Purposes.* The demands of the present situation dictate what will be perceived. We perceive whatever will satisfy current requirements.

Our perceptions, therefore, differ from those of other people. Frequently, we see or hear only what we want to see or hear and ignore all else. Our perceptions depend on our interests, backgrounds, and expectations. To a large degree, what we see or hear is dependent on what we *expect* to see or hear. For example, when the president of the United States is delivering his State of the Union message, those listening begin with certain expectations about the speech. Some listeners may expect him to discuss accomplishments of his administration and plans for the new year, while others may expect him to make political attacks or criticize his opposition. When the speech is delivered, the various listeners respond to the message on the basis of what they *think* they heard. The same speech may well express different meanings to different people because of different expectations. This same principle occurs again and again in the classroom. Students respond to a teacher's instructions from what they *think* they are hearing. Because of a variance of expectations which dictate what students think they are hearing, there will be a variety of completed assignments—some will be accurately executed and others will be totally incorrect. Interpretations depend on what we think we hear. Thus, we may conclude that the perceptual process we all experience is a vital part of communication. To speak accurately, we must perceive accurately; to avoid unpleasant misunderstandings, we must perceive clearly. The most successful communicators are those individuals who take the time to attempt to perceive objectively and fairly.

We know, of course, that our perceptions are not always clear and accurate. In communicating with others, we often give faulty explanations or information because of weaknesses in our own perceptions. Probably the largest obstacle to clear perception is our inability to take the time to think or observe carefully—we get in such a hurry with the routine of daily living. *Time* is a key factor. In haste, we make poor judgments; we miss important clues; we say things that we really do not mean to say. Bias or prejudice can also be an obstacle to clear perception. Often we see and believe what we want to see and believe, and in many cases, nothing can change our minds. If our relationship with others is to be meaningful, it is imperative that we communicate accurately, thus erasing obstacles to clear perception.

Often, difficulty arises in communication because of differences in perception. How can we be sure whose judgment is

correct? While there are no sure methods of checking for accuracy, there are steps we can take to improve our perceptions. First, we can learn to be more observant through more alert listening and devoting more of our attention to what is going on around us. Second, we can admit that errors can and do occur in our perceptions and be willing to recognize that it is often impossible to determine the "truth" in a given situation. Third, to check for accuracy in our perceptions, we can habitually learn to do one or a combination of the following things[6]:

1. *Check with Other People.* Sometimes it is possible that someone is present who could verify our perceptions. For example, if you and a friend attend a special program, you can check with each other for accuracy in your perceptions of what the speaker said. Or if you observe a car wreck, you could check with another pedestrian (perhaps a stranger) to determine if you saw the accident in the same way.
2. *Check by Repeating the Observation.* In some situations, it is feasible to repeat the observation. If you are shopping for a new coat, you may find one you like, but you may want to think about it awhile before purchasing it. After leaving the store, you may decide that the coat was not very attractive after all, based upon your memory of certain characteristics. To check your perception, you can merely go back to the store and look at the coat again. Of course, it is not possible to use this check for accuracy in all cases, for many events happen only one time with no allowance to repeat the observation.
3. *Check by Using Other Senses.* Most of our perceptions are determined by what we see, but we can often check by using another of our senses. For example, if you see a glass of milk that looks sour, you automatically check by smelling or tasting it. Or, perhaps you have fumbled around under your bed, trying to find your left shoe. You find one that feels like your left shoe, but you look at it to make sure. Using two or more senses is a relatively easy and logical way of checking our perceptions.
4. *Check by Recalling Past Experiences.* Occasionally, we can check a vague feeling or perception in the present by recalling a past experience. If friends invite you to a party and you experience a negative response, you might attempt to recall what happened the last time you joined that particular group of people.

How Is Perception Used in Communication?

Obviously, perception is the basis for communication. In our relationships with other people, we not only perceive them as individuals (sometimes stereotyping) but also rely upon our own perceptions while communicating with them. We perceive experiences, feelings, and ideas and share these perceptions with those around us. In addition, all of us perceive conscious and unconscious messages daily. Some of these messages register with us; others we ignore. For example, how many of us noticed the color of the eyes of the last listener with whom we communicated?

One problem in communicating is that we often use a process called projection or interpret actions of others on the basis of how or what we ourselves feel. For example, when we are happy and smiling, others we encounter tend to appear in the same mood; if we are depressed, those around us also seem downcast. In addition, we are more likely to perceive people we like as consistent with our own thinking and attitudes, and those we dislike as having opinions and beliefs different from ours *regardless of their actual feelings.*

Not only do we rely upon our perceptions of others in order to communicate, but we must remember that others are also perceiving us. Sometimes we associate others with a particular group or give them personal attributes that aid in our communication with them. This process of stereotyping, while convenient, can often hamper productive communication. Thus, we must be extremely careful in our perceptions of other people if we are to succeed in our relationships with them. Instead of rapid stereotyping, we need to keep our minds open and observe carefully in order to perceive more than a mere first or immediate impression.

Finally, our perceptions of language influence our behavior and attitudes. We know that politicians and advertisers rely heavily on words to sell their respective products. How we perceive language is going to affect our communication with others. We are familiar with the concept of "loaded" words and the fact that human beings respond differently and emotionally when certain words are used.

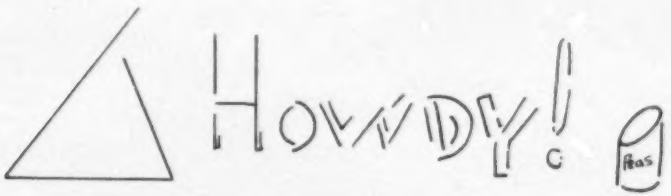
What Are the Basic Principles of Perception as Used in Communication?

Several experts have suggested factors which influence perception in the communication process. Psychologists have

revealed that perception involves more than merely the reactions of our senses. Certain principles have been established that explain how our brains react to a given situation. For the most part, we gain a majority of our information from what we see, hear, feel, and smell; however, eyesight is generally most useful. We are forced to "unscramble" what we see and this is often done on the basis of the following principles[7]:

Figure-Ground. Whenever we view a scene, our brain is able to distinguish between the actual figure that we see and the background surrounding it. For example, if we walk into a crowded room, we are aware of the mingling people, the walls, the furniture, but we see our friend (the figure) in the midst of all this and are able to separate our friend from the background. In other words, the figure stands out from everything else. Or perhaps when we see a fresh chocolate cake on the kitchen stove, we are aware of the stove and surrounding objects, but we focus on the cake (the figure) apart from its background. Often we distinguish the figure from the ground on the basis of its size, shape, or color, but factors such as expectancies, beliefs, and frequencies of past experiences also play a role.

Closure. In the event that all information is not present, our brains are capable of closing the gaps to make a complete figure or event. Consider the following:



The figures are not complete, but because of the closure principle, we tend to close the gaps and perceive a triangle, a message, and a can of peas. We often do the same thing in listening, that is, we do not always hear every word that is being spoken but rather close the gaps and perceive a message from the bits and pieces that we do hear. This same principle is used as we acquire impressions of other people. We characterize individuals by closing gaps, although we do not know all there is to know about them. Obviously, the closure principle often leads to some hasty (and unfair) conclusions.

Continuity. We often group items together because they seem to be following a continual direction or a particular pattern. Many times, our perceptions are inaccurate because of this principle. For example, in listening to a speaker, we may misinterpret the message if it varies from the course that we expect the speaker to take. Because the speaker has established certain points, we may wrongly assume what follows, especially when there is a switch in progression.

Proximity. Any time two or more items are close together, we tend, because of the principle of proximity or nearness, to group them together, even if there is no relationship between them. For example, at the grocery store we tend to perceive all of the tomatoes as alike, when, actually, one may be juicy and ripe and one next to it may be rotten and full of worms. Or, in listening to speakers representing the same organization—such as two Democrats, two leaders of the AFL-CIO, or two members of the American Medical Association—we may perceive their messages to be alike because of the proximity principle, when in reality the messages are quite different in message and tone.

Common Fate. Movement in the same direction tends to group elements together. Such an event creates a pattern that seems to constitute a whole unit. Regardless of other items that may be around, we perceive the moving elements apart from all else. A mob of people marching down the street toward the Capitol is perceived, not as individuals, but as a huge mass moving in the same direction. A swarm of bees racing to the hive is also perceived as a whole. Similar motion tends to create a pattern of unity.

Similarity. We often group elements together because they are similar to one another in shape, size, or color; thus we see them as parts of a pattern. For example, you may see a car that is similar to your own in color and style; thus, you perceive the car viewed as pretty much like yours in performance, price, and so on. Friendships are based largely on this principle—we tend to associate with those who have similar likes and dislikes to our own.

Perceptual Constancy. Once we have established a particular image of an item, rarely will we change our perceptions. We often consider elements stable and unchanging after we have formed our interpretations. Therefore, if we view items from a different angle, under different lighting, or from a different distance, we still maintain our original perceptions. In a dark

room, we perceive an apple to be red in color, when, actually, it does not show up as red in the darkness.

In summary, we should recognize that there are things we can do to improve communication through an understanding of perception. Realizing that much of what we perceive is based on what we expect to see or hear or happen, we can enlarge our range of expectations. In short, we need to decrease our stubborn, well-established attitudes and be willing to expect the unexpected. If we can learn to perceive with a more open mind and an awareness of perceptual bias, we will likely improve our communication with others.

The exercises in the following section are written for the use of secondary school teachers of speech and/or English. Since emphasis in communication education is shifting from public performance to interpersonal approaches, a fundamental aspect of instruction is awareness of experiences, observations, and feelings. Although the majority of our knowledge about perception was developed by psychologists, most of the sources used for the exercises stem from writers in speech communication. The intent here is to emphasize experiences of perception in communication.

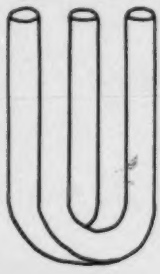
NOTES

1. John Platt, *Perception and Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 25.
2. Kathleen Galvin and Cassandra Book, *Person-to-Person: An Introduction to Speech Communication* (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1973), p. 22.
3. William Wilmot, *Dyadic Communication* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1975), p. 60.
4. Ralph Webb, Jr., *Interpersonal Speech Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 113.
5. Lew Sarett, William Trufant Foster, and Alma Johnson Sarett, *Basic Principles of Speech* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 379.
6. Gail Myers and Michele Myers, *The Dynamics of Human Communication* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973), pp. 25-26.
7. Webb, pp. 105-110.

Practice

Visual Illusions

Various communication books contain pictures and diagrams that provide clever perception problems. A worthwhile book to use is *The Dynamics Of Human Communication*, by Myers and Myers. Students usually enjoy such drawings and increase their understanding of perception by looking at them. Other simple demonstrations of perception puzzles or visual illusions include those found below. In figure A, describe the top, middle, and bottom of the figure. In figure B, are the lines crossing the circle horizontally parallel with one another? In figure C, stare at the little bar in the center; your mind will perform all sorts of perspective gymnastics as you seek different patterns.



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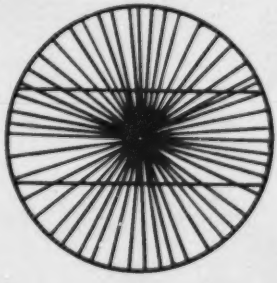

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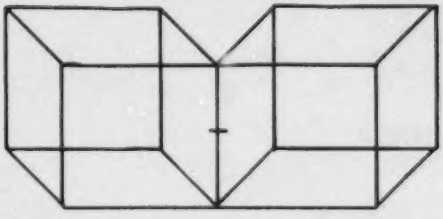

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Word Puzzle

In order to give the students a familiarity with terms and words used in the study of perception and communication, the following word puzzle is presented as a means of reviewing and emphasizing basic principles. The students can work individually or in groups of two or three. The students are to fill in the blanks for the following statements. They are then to locate and circle the answer in the word puzzle. Answers may appear horizontally, vertically, backwards, or diagonally.

Fill in the blanks:

A. (Perception) is how we see the world.

B. In order to improve our relationships with other people, we need to concentrate on clear, accurate (communication) .

C. Perception is the process by which we (filter) and (interpret) what our senses tell us.

D. Our senses allow us to (see) , (smell) , (taste) , (touch) , and (hear) .

E. One obstacle to clear perception is our failure to take adequate (time) .

F. It is possible for us to check for (accuracy) in our perceptions.

G. Whenever we determine what will be perceived, we are using the process of (selective) perception.

H. In closing the gaps of things we see and hear, we use the principle of (closure) .

I. We group things together which are near each other because of the principle of (proximity) .

J. In order to keep from being (bored) with monotonous (routine) , we need to be more (aware) of the wonders around us.

K. " (Variety) is the spice of life."

L. Words which create an emotional reaction are called (loaded) words.

M. Whoever finishes this puzzle first is going to get a (reward) .

N. In order to insure correct perceptions, we need to conduct a (check) .

O. We need clear perception in order to (speak) with precision.

P. Perception depends on the use of all of our (senses) .

Q. Texture of an item is usually determined by (touch) .

R. With our perceptions, we (identify) , then (organize) , and finally interpret whatever we (experience) .

S. We perceive differently because our perceptions are based on our (motivations) , (expectations) , and personal experiences.

T. To perceive well, we must (observe) constantly with open minds.

R	T	Z	M	S	P	E	A	K	F	Q	Y	O	H	B	C
B	N	C	V	A	R	I	E	T	Y	G	F	R	A	E	H
O	T	O	U	C	H	A	Y	T	I	M	I	X	O	R	P
R	C	M	I	N	T	E	R	P	R	E	T	M	I	W	S
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D	V	U	P	I	F	V	D	R	A	W	E	R	V	E	H
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O	E	A	L	L	E	M	S	M	E	G	T	S	T	W	T
L	L	T	Y	O	O	B	E	F	A	P	G	E	U	A	E
Z	E	I	A	W	S	S	E	N	S	E	S	R	O	R	P
K	S	O	M	S	U	U	I	P	L	V	T	V	R	E	X
T	U	N	O	O	T	Z	R	M	W	C	H	E	C	K	E
N	H	G	I	L	E	E	F	E	K	M	N	U	Y	R	A

Are We Aware?

So much of what we do and say and see is automatic. In a sense, we often act like robots, paying attention to little or nothing. To illustrate our lack of awareness, ask your students to answer the following questions:

A. What color are your mother's eyes?
B. How many trees are in the front yard of the house across the street from where you live?
C. What color is your math book?
D. When and where did you meet your best friend for the first time?
E. What did you have for lunch yesterday?
F. When was the last time you saw a flower in bloom?
G. What was the name of the last book you read just for fun?
H. Describe vividly the scene from your bedroom window.
I. What brand of handsoap do you use at home?
J. Without looking, what color of socks are you wearing? What color of shoes are you wearing?
K. Describe the cover of the latest magazine you have looked through.
L. Can you describe the paintings or pictures hanging in your school library?
M. When was the last time you watched the sun rise?
N. What did your English teacher wear to school on the day before yesterday?
O. What color is your comb?
P. How many stop signs do you pass on your way to school?

Talk about reasons for our lack of awareness. Why is awareness important to communication?

Sensitivity Exercises

One of the reasons for problems in communication is that we simply are not observant. Although most of us are born with numerous senses, we seldom use our senses to capacity. By being more aware and observant, we are better able to communicate clearly and accurately. To increase usage of our senses, try some of the following sensitivity exercises and encourage the students to share their perceptions orally with others.

Sound. Instruct the students to close their eyes and listen to the sounds in the classroom. Each person makes a list of all the things that he or she can hear (tick of a clock, slamming door, footsteps outside, etc.). After about five minutes, compare the lists aloud. Did all the students hear the same sounds?

Bring a tape recording of various musical selections. Include rock, jazz, western, opera, instrumental, religious, and classical.

Have the students listen to the tape; then talk about their reaction to the different types of music. What did they like? Dislike? Why? What were the students thinking about as they listened?

Take the students outside and find a place where they can sit and listen to sounds. After a period of silence, have them talk about the experience. Are the sounds more obvious outside than inside? Harder to distinguish? More varied? Talk about differences in classroom sounds as compared to outdoor sounds.

With a cassette tape recorder, visit a variety of places and record the sounds for a few minutes. You might choose a department store, ballgame, restaurant, airport, movie theatre, bowling alley, elementary school playground, library, service station, laundromat, or others. Play the recording to the students and have them identify the places where the sounds originated. You might even offer a reward to the individual who correctly identifies the most places. Let the students talk about their perceptions of the various sounds.

Touch. Prepare a number of paper bags that contain unusual textured objects, such as an artificial flower, seashell, odd-shaped piece of jewelry, figurine, stuffed animal or bean bag, fishing reel, or whatever. If possible and practical, prepare one paper bag for each student in the class. Have the students orally describe the objects in the sacks by feel only. If they recognize the object by feel, they should not identify it but should describe its shape, size, and texture to see if class members can guess what it is. Talk about the difficulty in identification by touch.

Assign individual students items to describe. They may not identify the object but must communicate how the item feels. They should describe its texture by using vivid words and precise language. Some possible items might include the following: snake, needle, grass, thistle, clay, velvet, jello, pine cone, sand, paint brush, grape, auto tire, baby, hammer, and can opener.

Sight. Select a day to have your desk cluttered with many items—anything from ping-pong balls to firecrackers. Try to have from 50 to 100 different objects. Ask the students to list all the things they see on the desk and then share their lists with the rest of the class. Have the students discuss what they saw and what they failed to notice. Point out the differences that occurred in the description of the items. Did all the students identify the objects with the same wording?

Show the students a bookcase full of books (located in an office,

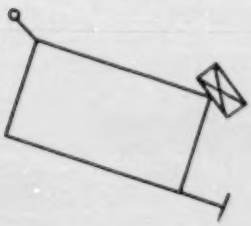
library, or another classroom). Ask the students to describe what they see. What information can be gained from viewing the books? What can be determined about the person to whom the books belong?

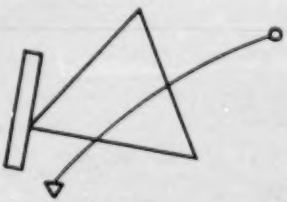
To illustrate the influence of place and space on communication, take the students to three different offices or rooms. Have them describe the differences, such as furniture arrangement, decorations, and use of color. What conclusions can be drawn from viewing the three places? What type of communication relationships exist in each place?

Visualizing Instructions

Instruct the students to draw whatever they envision from the following explanations. The idea is to note differences in perception and apply checks for accuracy.

Choose or create several simple geometric-type drawings. Do not show the diagrams to the students, but give them basic, easy instructions on what to draw. Do not repeat any of the directions. Do not allow the students to ask questions. Be sure to plan in advance exactly *how* you will give the directions. Some possible diagrams include the following:





When the students have finished, allow them to check for accuracy of their perceptions by using any method of check that was discussed in class. For example, they may check with others who also did the drawing, or they may ask for a repeat of the total explanation.

You might also assign each student the task of devising and communicating a simple drawing to the class. Such an activity gives practice in perceiving without seeing for class members, and practice in distinct, accurate communication for each direction giver.

Find a description of an uncommon animal. Read the description to the class and let the students draw what they perceive. Animals that you might use include the Uganda kob, Mongolian

gazelle, Alpine marmot, mongoose, or African impala. A complete example is given here:

> gnu—they are of rather large size and compact build, with a large ox-like head and short mane; the horns, which are present in both sexes, curve downward and outward and then up, and their bases in old individuals form a frontal shield; the tail is long and flowing, and there is long hair on the throat.[4]

In groups of four or five, allow the students to compare their perceptions of the animal with others. Encourage them to talk about any misperceptions that may have occurred and why. Were there some students who would not even try to draw the animal? Ask them to explain why.

Select a number of well-known roles that people play. Write each one on a slip of paper. Suggestions are enemy, movie star, imp, animal lover, athlete, mother, dancer, thinker, tyrant, friend, and bookworm. With masking tape, affix a role to the forehead of each student so the student cannot see it. Instruct the students to stroll around the room, chatting with one another. Their verbal and nonverbal responses to questions should reflect the role taped to the forehead of the other person without revealing what that role is. After 10 or 15 minutes, have the students draw a picture of the role they believe has been assigned to them on the basis of reactions and responses of their classmates. When all have finished, remove the signs and show the drawings to the class. This same exercise could be performed orally by having the students describe their roles as perceived. Encourage the students to discuss the experience.

Walk-Around

So that the students can gain practice in observation and awareness, ask them to walk around the room at random (you might even play music). After three or four minutes, call a halt and ask the students to select the person closest to them for a partner. The two partners are to say nothing and observe each other carefully. After about one minute, have the students turn away from their partners and change three things about their appearance. For example, they could take out their shirt tails, untie their shoes, remove jewelry, or whatever. After about a minute, ask the students to turn back to their partners. The challenge is to see if they can perceive the changes in their partners. You might even try the same exercise again, beginning with another walk-around and insisting that everyone have a new partner. After the experiments, a discussion of the episode would be appropriate.

Perceiving and Space[6]

On a nice day, take the students outside (each with paper and pencil) to a quiet, remote place on the school campus. Ask each student to locate an item (car, sign, flower, leaf, some trash, etc.) that is situated at least fifty feet away. After studying the chosen object for a few minutes, each student should write a comprehensive description of the item. When all the students have finished, instruct them to move within ten feet of their chosen subject and write additional observations. Next, have the students encounter the subject directly by using all appropriate senses (touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing). After becoming directly acquainted with the chosen item, the students are to write additional comments about their observations. Upon completion of the written descriptions, have the students read their papers to the class. Discuss any changes that occurred in the description. Can others in the group perceive things that were omitted from the description? Was the description vivid and accurate? Talk about the differences that space made in the perceptions of an object.

Unannounced Observation

Arrange to have one or two drama students (or other likely persons), dressed in weird costumes with crazy make-up, dash unannounced into your classroom. They should shout a message (perhaps part of it even in a foreign language) showing an emotion such as anger or fear. They might even wrestle with one another or carry some unusual props. Use your imagination in planning this scene, which should last about thirty seconds. Then have your "actors" make a fast exit. Ask the class to write a paragraph on what they saw, describing the characters, dialogue, and event. Have the students read the papers aloud to the class and talk about the differences that they perceived. Ask the "actors" to return and perform the same scene again. Allow time for the class to discuss the experience and how they reacted to the episode.

Listening and Perceiving

Send five students out of the classroom. Select a short story or a picture to show the class. Choose a simple story from a magazine or book of short stories about five minutes in length. If you prefer, you can tell the story rather than read it. The selection must be exciting, must hold the students' interest, and must have some detail. If you choose a picture for this activity, find a large one that has some intricate details. Discuss the

picture with the class before trying to describe it to those students outside the classroom. After telling the story (or showing the picture) to the class, ask one of the students in the class to relate her perceptions of your presentation to one of the students sent out of the room. In turn, that student will tell her perceptions to the second student who in turn will relate her perceptions to the third student and so on until all five of the students are back in the classroom. The last student is to recount her perceptions of what was heard. Discuss with the class the differences between the original oral presentation and the final perceptions from the fifth student. What was different? What was changed? What was omitted? What was added? Point out the variance that we experience in our perceptions and discuss why. You might try the activity again with a different story to see if the next group would be more aware having learned from the first group's experience.

Nonverbal Perceptions

We often perceive messages on the basis of nonverbal communications. Just as in speaking, we can misperceive messages that are delivered nonverbally. Many authorities argue that more communication is achieved nonverbally than verbally. Practice in nonverbal communication can strengthen our ability to express our meanings to other people. Try the following:

Have the students plan a 30-second pantomime in which they attempt to show their classmates *how* to do something. All communication must be nonverbal.

Put a list of emotions—such as joy, fear, anger, surprise, anxiety, jealousy, hopefulness, delight—on small slips of paper. Each student is to draw a slip of paper and convey the emotion written on that slip to the rest of the class without using words. Emphasize the need for variety in gesture and movement.

Ask the students to prepare a brief two-minute speech in which their gestures and body movements contradict what they are saying.

Take the students to a place where they can observe while making sure they stay out of ear-shot. Have them make a list of nonverbal activities. What messages were being conveyed in the nonverbal movements? Have them make another list of nonverbal messages that are usually universally accepted, such as nodding the head.

Divide the class into groups of five or six students. Choose one member of each group to leave the room. The remaining members are told that they must communicate nonverbally to

their teammate when he or she returns. All groups are assigned the same message. Team members in the group may not leave their desk nor can they literally perform the task. The challenge is to get the student outside the room to perform a task when he or she returns without actually telling the student. When the message is clearly understood by each group, the outsiders are brought in and asked to report to their own group. The team who succeeds *first* in getting their teammate to perform the task receives 10 points. The game continues with new instructions and different people leaving the room until time is up or until all the instructions have been used. Sample directions include the following:

Hop on one foot around in a circle.
Find a green book.
Write your name on the blackboard.
Find a paper cup.
Pat the heads of all members in another group.
Pretend to play a game of hop-scotch.
Find a newspaper.

Banana Game

In order to demonstrate that we often fail to take adequate time to perceive the world around us, bring a sack of fresh bananas or oranges (one piece of fruit for every two students) to class. Ask various students to describe their perceptions of the fruit. The descriptions will all sound similar. Then divide the class into pairs with one teammember facing the wall. Give the other person a banana and ask him or her to describe it vividly to the teammember. The description should take about five or ten minutes, as all distinctive characteristics must be described. After this is done, collect the fruit and put it in a pile on the table. The second member of each team must try to identify the piece of fruit described by his or her teammember. Generally, about 95 percent accuracy will result. Discuss with the class the idea that even items that appear to be alike can be perceived differently through careful study and observation.

Perceiving People (Stereotyping)

Have the students work on activities involving people. For example, show the students a series of pictures in which people are shown doing various things. Have the students write their perceptions of each person. In small groups, have the students compare their perceptions with others in the class. What are the differences? Discuss why these differences occur.

Put five items of personal attire and/or grooming tools on your desk. These could be a cowboy hat, large or gaudy earring, leather sandal, Afro comb, or school letterjacket. Each student is to write a 200-word paper on the type of individual who would own and use such an object. Afterwards, the students should read their papers to the class. Discussion follows. Do the other students agree with the perceptions? Can anyone think of possible exceptions to the perceptive descriptions?

Divide the class into small groups of four or five. On the basis of past experiences and attitudes, have each student orally describe to the others in the group his or her perceptions of a teacher, a parent, a police officer, a politician, and a bank president. Through small group interaction, have the members of each group pool their ideas until they come up with a basic description on which all (or most) can agree. Have all the groups present their results to the rest of the class.

Have each student plan and present orally a character analysis of a television personality. Emphasize the importance of going beneath the surface of the character. The student should consider dress and appearance, mannerisms and habits, and relationships to others on the same show. On the basis of this perception of a television personality, would the student enjoy having the selected celebrity as a close personal friend? Why or why not?

Differing Perceptions

An interesting exercise to illustrate differing perceptions is to conduct a mock trial in which the same evidence is perceived differently by those participating—jurors, witnesses, and courtroom personnel. If possible and convenient, take the students on a field trip to a courtroom—to actually witness a trial or part of one would be most helpful. From the experience of observing a courtroom scene, the students will be better able to perceive the various roles and their relationships to one another. In the event that a field trip cannot be arranged, you might try to get a video taped television program of a trial, such as "Perry Mason" or "Owen Marshall," so that the students can view the procedure. Assign each student a role—judge, bailiff, defendant, district attorney, defense attorney, and witnesses. Invite another class (perhaps a government class) to serve as jury and audience. A small committee can be appointed to create the case, or the teacher can establish the situation. It is usually more workable if the actual crime can be re-created with witnesses "planted" where needed. Care must be taken to insure that the case will not

be an obvious one; there must be circumstantial evidence and unknown facts. Given pre-arranged facts, the students improvise their roles as they perceive them. Trials could be conducted for automobile casualty claims, arson, murder, embezzlement, or whatever. An example of a situation is outlined briefly here.

Charge: Robbery

Situation: The principal's office at Central High School houses the school safe. On the night of September 18, the office was broken into and the entire safe was stolen. Authorities estimated that almost $5,000 was in the safe which contained money from the cafeteria, proceeds from a school musical production, vending machine money, and money collected for school pictures. Entry was gained by breaking a window in the boys' restroom near the office and the glass door of the office. There were no fingerprints. The only thing taken was the safe. The robbery was discovered early the next morning at 5:45 a.m. by the chief custodian when he arrived for work. Three days later, the empty safe was found at the county dump grounds. The door had been completely blown off.

Defendant: Joe, a senior football player at Central High, was arrested and brought to trial. He claimed that he was simply driving around town by himself on the night of the robbery. There were no witnesses to verify his alibi.

Witness A: Sue, Joe's girlfriend, claimed that she was with Joe that night until about 10:00 p.m. He seemed normal and natural when he took her home.

Witness B: Coach Higgins, head football coach, testifies that Joe was bitter toward the school for being kicked off the football team for violating training rules. He adds that Joe had promised "to get even."

Witness C: George, Joe's best friend, is used as a character witness to tell what a fine person Joe is.

Witness D: Frank, a schoolmate, heard Joe threatening to do something "awful" to the school. Joe made this threat while they were eating in the school lunchroom one day.

Witness E: Mr. Jones, a car salesman, says that Joe bought a new car several days after the robbery.

Witness F: Mr. Durham, Joe's father, insists that Joe was in need of nothing; he had probably saved money from summer jobs to pay for the car, but he was not sure where Joe got the money. He claims that Joe has never been in any kind of trouble before.

Witness G: Betty, a friend, says that she saw a car that could have been Joe's driving toward town from the county dump ground on the night in question.

Additional witnesses may be added as needed. Class time will

be needed to prepare for the trial. Each person needs to have his or her role and testimony clearly in mind. It is advisable to clear each story with a coordinator (usually the teacher) to make sure that glaring inconsistencies and overlap do not exist. All roles must be improvised to include items that are above and beyond the bare facts.

A video tape recording of the proceedings would be helpful. At the completion of the activity, the tape could be replayed for the purpose of discovering different perceptions of the evidence as presented.

Reacting to Loaded Words

After discussing ways in which language affects people, talk about "loaded" words and the reactions gained from the use of such words. Try some of the following:

Have the students bring magazine ads to class and explain how "loaded" words are used to sell a product. Also have them review editorials in the local newspaper and discuss the use of "loaded" words.

Provide the students with a list of loaded words. Ask each student to write a paragraph using at least five such words. Have the students read the paragraph to the class. What is the reaction of the other students? Does the use of "loaded" words make a difference in the message perceived? How?

Instruct the students to write two paragraphs; one in which the language is descriptive, but ordinary; the other should be written with the same message in mind, but with the use of "loaded" words. Discuss the different reactions to the two paragraphs as each student reads to the class. Can the students identify the "loaded" words?

Jumping to Conclusions

We are often guilty of jumping to hasty conclusions without considering all known facts with precision. Instruct the students to read the story below and then respond to the questions:

> A green automobile, parked in front of the home of Charles Brown at 3329 Greenwood Street, is observed. Carrying a black bag, a greying man gets out of the car and immediately slips on a roller skate.

T	F	A.	The car parked at 3329 Greenwood Street is green.
T	F	B.	The occupant of the car is a doctor.
T	F	C.	Someone is sick at the Brown's house.
T	F	D.	The Browns have children.
T	F	E.	The man driving the car has grey hair.
T	F	F.	Charles Brown lives at 3329 Greenwood Street.

T F G. The man hurt himself when he fell.
T F H. The sidewalk was hazardous because of the roller skate.
T F I. The man in the car carried a black bag.
T F J. The Browns are expecting a visitor.

Have the students explain orally their perceptions of the episode and defend their answers to the statements. Talk about the dangers of making hasty conclusions in communication.

Perception from Another Viewpoint

Students should be encouraged to consider the other side of situations, controversies, or questions. Using activities that change the usual perspective or expectations of students gives them an opportunity to experience and talk about viewpoints other than their own. Imaginations are given practice; creativity is employed. There are any number of situations that could be used to provide experience in perceiving from another viewpoint, but here are some suggestions (all of these are to be presented orally).

Have the students pretend to be tiny ants who are sent out of the ant hill to find an insect for food. How would an ant perceive our world?

We hear a lot these days about unidentified flying objects and little green people from outer space. Instruct the students to orally describe our planet from the viewpoint of a visitor from another planet. Comparisons of the two planets might be used.

Have the students select a well-known story, such as "Beauty and the Beast," "The Three Pigs," "Jack and the Beanstalk," or "Hansel and Gretel," and tell the story from a viewpoint other than the one already known, for example, from the standpoint of the beast, the wolf, the giant, or the witch.

Group Discussion

Divide the class into groups of five. Assign each group a different topic in which their perceptions are important. The following are suggested topics:

How we perceive "Utopia."
Our perception of being a success in today's world.
Our perception of current teenage problems.
Our perception of the ideal school building.

Allow the students to work in class at least one day to prepare their discussion presentation. They need to toss around their ideas and come up with some concrete suggestions and thoughts.

Have the students present their discussion to the rest of the class, allowing time at the end for questions, answers, and comments.

Beliefs and Assumptions

Have each student prepare a three-minute oral presentation on a belief or assumption that they have always had. Appropriate topics might include the following:

Girls are smarter than boys.
Women are more emotional than men.
All politicians are corrupt.
Female drivers are more prone to accidents than males.
Rich people get all the tax breaks.
If a family has only one child, that child is spoiled.
A broken mirror will bring seven years of bad luck.

After each student's presentation, allow time for the class to evaluate his or her long-held assumptions and beliefs. Are the student's perceptions accurate? Does the entire class agree with the student? Why or why not?

Keeping the same topic, have each student research in the library for evidence from experts and then orally present the results, which should either confirm or deny the student's original belief.

Holiday Perceptions

Allow students to select (or assign) an American or foreign holiday for study. In this activity, each student is to give an oral presentation of his or her perceptions of a particular holiday. The information may be based on research or personal experience or both. Traditions associated with the day, why the day is celebrated, who observes the holiday, why that particular date is of importance, and who decided on the holiday should be included. If feasible, the student might even offer suggestions for improving the celebration. It would also be interesting to know how that particular individual celebrates that special day (assuming that it is celebrated). Contrasting perceptions of holidays would also be of interest, such as Christmas as perceived by a Jewish student and by a Christian student.

Taping Observations

With a cassette tape recorder, have students locate themselves and a partner in a suitable place in your school (library, classroom, lunch room, band hall, gymnasium, etc.). Have the students spend five minutes observing their location; then,

retreating to a secluded corner, each student is to record his or her own observations. When the recording session is finished, each is to return to the regular classroom and compare the recordings with their partner to see what was like and/or different. Have the students make a list of the similarities and differences; then have them return to their location and check the list, noting things that were missed. Allow each team to talk about the differences, and then hold a class discussion. Why were some things seen by some students but not by others? Did the students include only what they could see, or did they list the sounds and smells as well? Did they include how they felt there? How thorough were the descriptions?

Perceptions Based on Research

There are many opportunities for students to benefit from doing research on particular subjects to reinforce or establish a specific perception of a topic. Students need experience in searching for facts and learning to use a variety of sources for gaining information. In doing research, the students benefit from practice in conveying their knowledge and perceptions to others as well as getting valuable experience in research techniques.

Preparing an oral report on their perceptions of another culture is an interesting activity the students might undertake. Emphasis should be on unusual customs and habits, traditions, mode of dress, political and religious views, economic conditions, and so on. They should be encouraged to use as many different sources as they can find in order to insure accuracy and fairness in perceptions. Plenty of time should be allotted for adequate preparation; the presentation, information, ideas, and speaking techniques should be of prime importance.

Miscellaneous Perception Exercises

1. On a day when there are many billowing clouds, take the class outside to observe them. Let each student discuss what formations or constructions he or she sees, in such a way that others in the class may perceive the same formation.
2. Have students write word balloons for facial pictures taken from magazines or books. Baby pictures are perfect. Have them explain the reason for choosing those words.
3. Have the students give an oral presentation where they describe their perceptions of a delicious meal. Why and how is such a meal delicious?

4. Divide the class into partners. Blindfold one partner and have the other partner lead the blindfolded student around the school. There should be no talking during the tour. Have the students report their thoughts and feelings of the experience when all are back in the classroom.
5. Discuss the life of Helen Keller and consider what life must have been like for her.
6. Ask the students to describe orally their perceptions of some object from two different positions. For example, they could describe their perceptions of an automobile while standing across the street, contrasted with their perceptions of that same automobile from a kneeling position at the bumper of the car. Or, they could describe an end table while seated in a chair and while lying on the floor. This activitiy clearly illustrates the importance of position and location in determining our perceptions.
7. Instruct the students to prepare an oral presentation in which they explain the possible perceptions of four different people in the same situation. Since our personal interests, backgrounds, and expectations dictate a large portion of our perceptions, various individuals would obviously perceive differently. For example, how would an old lady, a teenager, a preacher, and a five-year old child perceive a rock concert?

NOTES

1. *Newsweek*, February 15, 1965, p. 57.
2. Ibid., p. 56.
3. *Life*, October 22, 1971, p. 63.
4. Adapted from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* 2nd ed. (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1952), p. 1070.
5. The idea for this activity was taken from *Teaching Human Beings: 101 Subversive Activities for the Classroom* by Jeffrey Schrank (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 7. [ED 064 869]
6. The idea for this activity was taken from *Our World and Welcome to It: A Handbook for Environmental Education* by Jack Seilheimer and Ed Lane, ca. 1973. [ED 082 968]
7. The idea for this activity was taken from *The Interpersonal Communication Book* by Joseph A. DeVito (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 320.

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